

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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MEMORANDUM

Egypt: Mubarak and the USSR [] 25X1

Summary

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is quietly altering the tone of Cairo's relations with Moscow and has largely abandoned President Sadat's harsh anti-Soviet rhetoric. Mubarak shares Sadat's deep concern about Soviet intentions in the Middle East, however, and a dramatic improvement in relations is unlikely. []

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This memorandum was prepared by [] of the Office of Near East/South Asia Analysis. It was requested by the National Security Council. Information as of 7 January 1982 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to Director, Near East/South Asia Analysis []

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Mubarak's Attitude

Mubarak has avoided the vitriolic attacks on the Soviets that were common under Sadat. In recent speeches Mubarak has stressed Egypt's nonaligned status and has offered to "put the residue of the past behind" in his country's relations with the superpowers. Mubarak has also abandoned harsh polemics against the Soviet Union's Arab allies, including Libya and Syria, as part of his campaign to ease Egypt's isolation in the Arab world. [REDACTED]

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Shortly before his death Sadat accused Soviet diplomats of interfering in Egyptian internal affairs and stimulating unrest between the country's Coptic Christian and Muslim communities. The Soviet Ambassador and several diplomats were expelled. Mubarak has dropped these allegations, freed the Egyptians implicated in the affair, and completed arrangements to reduce the Soviet presence. These allow 95 Soviet Embassy officials to work in Egypt. Soviet media, shipping, and airline officials assigned to Egypt bring the total Soviet presence to about 135.

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Egyptian Interest Groups and the USSR

Several important constituencies inside Egypt are probably encouraging Mubarak to improve the atmosphere in Soviet-Egyptian relations. Many diplomats in the Foreign Ministry have long been uneasy over Egypt's poor relations with the USSR and its close ties to the United States, an imbalance they believe damages Cairo's credentials as a nonaligned state. [REDACTED]

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Some of these officials began their careers under President Nasir and probably recall with pride Egypt's status during that era as a major player in Third World politics. Others simply believe that Sadat's pro-US policies have isolated Egypt from much of the Third World and unnecessarily involved Egypt in

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superpower tensions. Key officials like Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Butrus Ghali and Mubarak's speech writer Usama al-Baz have long believed Sadat went too far in antagonizing Moscow.

There are probably also some military officers who would welcome improved ties with the Soviets in order to regain access to Soviet weapons and spare parts. A large percentage of Egypt's arms inventory is composed of Soviet equipment purchased in the early 1970s, and it is badly in need of replacement or repair. The long delivery schedules for some US equipment provide an added incentive for Egypt to maintain its Soviet-origin arsenal.

Finally, many Egyptian opposition leaders favor improved ties with the Soviets. All three legal opposition parties advocate cooler relations with the United States and a more balanced approach to the Soviets. The National Progressive Unionist Grouping, which has ties to the illegal Communist Party, attends Soviet-sponsored conferences in the USSR, and NPUG leader Khalid Muhyi-al-din has visited Moscow often. The larger Socialist Labor Party has ties with the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization, a pro-Soviet Third World organization sponsored by Nasir in the 1960s.

These opposition parties have no direct influence on Egyptian foreign policy, but they influence the thinking of the country's intellectual elite. They share the same sentiments expressed by Foreign Ministry officials who want to refurbish Egypt's nonaligned credentials.

Outlook

A dramatic change in Egyptian-Soviet ties is not likely under Mubarak. Like Sadat, he is deeply suspicious of Moscow's policies in the Middle East. Mubarak, moreover, spent several years training as an Air Force pilot in Soviet military academies and appears to have come away with a strong aversion for Communism and Russians in general.

Nonetheless, continued quiet changes in the tone of Egyptian-Soviet relations are likely. After the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in April, Mubarak may choose to send a new ambassador to Moscow to fill the position that has been vacant since January 1980.

Mubarak may also give more attention to the Soviet proposal to hold an international conference on the Middle East problem.

Mubarak's advisers have long counseled involving the Soviets in the peace process. Some of

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Egyptian officials are increasingly pessimistic about the prospects for a breakthrough in the drawn out Egyptian-Israeli autonomy negotiations. Even before Sadat's death Egypt was beginning to consider other negotiating formats to replace the autonomy talks after the Israeli withdrawal in April and had expressed vague interest in the Soviet proposal. The Egyptians almost certainly would prefer an alternative to the Soviet plan such as Saudi Crown Prince Fahd's eight-point proposal, but Cairo seems willing to listen to Soviet suggestions. [REDACTED]

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